DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 787 CG 018 072

AUTHOR Anderson, Jeff; And Others
TITLE A Survey of Abuse of the Elderly in Texas.
INSTITUTION Gray Panthers of Austin, TX.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society (37th, San Antonio, TX, November 16-20, 1984).
AVAILABLE FROM Gray Panthers of Austin, 7710 West Rim, Austin, TX 78731 ($1.00).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aging (Individuals); *Elder Abuse; *Family Violence; Gerontology; Helplessness; Individual Needs; *Older Adults; *Parent Child Relationship; Professional Personnel; State Surveys
IDENTIFIERS *Texas

ABSTRACT

Many elderly persons suffer abuse and neglect from which they cannot escape. Questions concerning the extent of elder abuse, the kinds of abuse, and underlying factors associated with elder abuse in Texas were explored in a survey of professionals most likely to encounter elder abuse in their work. Questionnaires (1,508) were mailed to agencies and individuals involved in home health services, legal and social services, health care, law enforcement, and others. To guide them in identifying local conditions, respondents were given definitions for physical abuse, exploitation, verbal/emotional abuse, active neglect, and self-neglect. Results showed that elder abuse was occurring in both rural and urban areas of Texas, and that all types of abuse were occurring. Over two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they had encountered elder abuse in their work. Many reported multiple types of abuse and some included descriptions of abused elders they had encountered. The most frequently reported causative factor behind elder abuse was long-term environmental conditions. Education about the nature and causes of elder abuse is necessary for both the general public and professionals caring for the elderly. (NRB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED254787

A SURVEY OF ABUSE OF THE ELDERLY IN TEXAS

Jeff Anderson
Melissa Eddy
Mike Fendrick
Charlotte Flynn
Anna Harvey
Sue Kelley
Karen Mountain
Kathy Strong

Gray Panthers of Austin
Austin, TX

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

X Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Charlotte Flynn

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 018072

Paper presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society, San Antonio, TX. November 16-20, 1984.

A STUDY OF ELDERLY ABUSE IN TEXAS.

Many elderly persons suffer abuse and neglect from which they cannot escape. Elderly abuse is a very serious problem nation-wide. In 1982 the Gray Panthers of Austin conducted a state-wide survey of 1500 professionals most likely to encounter elder abuse in their work such as physicians, nurses, law enforcement personnel & social service workers. The survey inquired about the extent to which respondents encountered cases of elderly abuse, what types of abuse were observed, and what factors were believed to have contributed to the abuse. The results clearly indicate that physical abuse, exploitation, active neglect, self-neglect, and verbal/emotional abuse are occurring in both rural and urban areas of Texas. Almost 2/3rds of the respondents indicated that they had encountered elderly abuse in their work and the survey results provide strong evidence that it forms a significant part of the family violence problem in Texas. The hidden nature of elder abuse suggests that in common with other types of abuse of humans only the visible tip of the iceberg of the problem is being noted. The full report of the study suggests further directions for research, including possibilities for prevention and intervention.

A SURVEY OF ABUSE OF THE ELDERLY IN TEXAS*

This report is taken from a survey conducted in 1982 by the Gray Panthers of Austin. To the best of our knowledge it is the first statewide survey on elder abuse in the United States.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In its six years of advocacy efforts on behalf of elderly Texans, the Gray Panthers organization has become increasingly aware that many elderly persons suffer abuse and neglect. With this awareness came many unanswered questions, as well as the realization that the search for answers would be a difficult as it is imperative.

Elder abuse**, like other forms of family violence (i.e., child abuse, spouse abuse) goes on largely unreported. Children and spouses are seen outside the home by teachers, nurses, doctors and others who may recognize signs of abuse. The elderly person, however, is often isolated for reasons such as illness and/or lack of transportation and, therefore, has few outside contacts. Because of this isolation, it has been difficult to determine the extent of elder abuse and of the causative factors of the abuse. The nature of elder abuse makes it necessary to begin by surveying the people most likely to encounter elder abuse in their work, with the realization that the results will reveal only that most visible part of the problem.

A survey about elder abuse in Brazoria County was conducted in 1979 by Mary Ann Beachler, R.N., of the Visiting Nurse Association of Brazoria County, Inc. As in the present study, community professionals were asked about the extent to which they encountered elder abuse in their work. The results of that survey not only indicated that abuse of the elderly was prevalent, but also suggested that the problem was not easily identified and therefore was greatly underreported.

---

* Support for this study was provided by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health and the Institute of Human Development and Family Studies, The University of Texas at Austin.

** The term "abuse" is used in this study to include physical abuse, passive abuse (neglect), financial abuse (exploitation), and other forms of mistreatment of the elderly. "Elderly" is used to include persons 65 years of age or older.

c 1983 Gray Panthers of Austin, 7710 West Rim Drive, Austin, Texas 78731

The Brazoria study, though limited in scope, pointed out the need for further investigation of the problem. The present study has attempted to meet that need by conducting a similar survey statewide.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to answer the following questions:

1. What is the extent of elder abuse in Texas?
2. Where in Texas does elder abuse occur?
3. What kinds of elder abuse occur?
4. What kinds of elder abuse occur most frequently?
5. What seem to be some of the underlying factors associated with elder abuse, and which factors seem to be most common?

Methodology

A questionnaire modelled after the Brazoria County survey was sent to agencies and individuals whose practice brings them into contact with elderly persons or their families, or who might possibly get reports of elder abuse. The groups or individuals included:

1. Home Health Services
2. Legal Services: Justices of the Peace
3. Social Services: Hospital Social Workers
4. Health Care: Physicians
5. Health Care: Nurses
6. Law Enforcement: Sheriffs, Police Departments
7. Other

The questionnaire was mailed to a total of 1,508 agencies and individuals all over Texas who could be identified as falling within the above categories. All the private home health agencies in Texas were sent a questionnaire. One justice of the peace for each of 214 of the counties in Texas received a questionnaire. A questionnaire was sent to all the hospital social workers in Texas. Every fourth general practitioner from the Texas Medical Association's list of general practitioners was chosen to receive a questionnaire, making sure that all areas of Texas were covered. A questionnaire was sent to all nurses in charge of every public health district in Texas. The fifty-six largest police departments in Texas received a questionnaire; and then a questionnaire was sent

to every law enforcement department in counties not included by the fifty-six largest Texas police departments. Some Texas counties do not have a police department. Questionnaires were sent to all battered women shelters in Texas, to the Dallas MHMR Center, to all Meals on Wheels programs on the Meals on Wheels Association list, and to those who requested information from Gray Panthers about elder abuse. This last on the list of those to whom the questionnaire was sent are included in the "Other" respondent group. Over all, every county in Texas was sent at least one questionnaire. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was provided to boost the questionnaire return rate.

RESULTS

Response Rates

A total of 1,508 questionnaires were mailed to individuals or agencies. The number of persons or agencies asked to respond in the various respondent groups are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: RESPONSES AND RATES BY GROUP

Respondent Group	Number Mailed	Number Returned	Percent Returned
Home Health Services	279	63	22.6
Legal Services: Justices of the Peace	214	61	28.5
Social Services: Hospital Social Workers	169	102	60.4
Health Care: Physicians	416	51	12.3
Health Care: Nurses	76	36	47.4
Law Enforcement: Sheriffs, Police Departments	224	67	29.9
Other	130	119	91.5
Did not indicate Group		8	

A total of 507 responses were obtained for a response rate of 33.6 percent. For the response numbers and rates for each respondent group again, refer to Table 1.

Some of the percentages in the results do not add up to 100 percent. This is due to mismarking or failure to answer certain questions by some respondents. A copy of the entire questionnaire is included at the end of the report.

Each respondent group represents a substantial percentage of the total respondents, so the survey results are not slanted by the experience or opinion of any one respondent group (Table 2).

TABLE 2: PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL RESPONDENTS BY RESPONDENT GROUP

Respondent Group	Percent of Total Respondents
Home Health Services	12.6
Legal Services: Justices of the Peace	12.2
Social Services: Hospital Social Workers	20.4
Health Care: Physicians	10.2
Health Care: Nurses	7.2
Law Enforcement: Sheriffs, Police Departments	13.4
Other	23.8

Questionnaires were returned from all parts of Texas, rural and urban areas, small towns and large cities. So we can safely say that the survey results speak for the state as a whole (Tables 3 & 4).

TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS BY POPULATION OF AREA IN WHICH THEY WORK

Area	Percent
Urban	47.6
Rural	28.7
Urban-Rural	23.5

TABLE 4: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS BY POPULATION OF AREA IN WHICH THEY WORK

Population	Percent	Population	Percent
Less than 5,000	10.8	50,000 - 100,000	11.0
5,000- 25,000	24.1	100,000 - 250,000	13.3
25,000 - 50,000	8.7	Over 250,000	32.1

Of these respondents, including all respondent groups and all parts of Texas, when asked if they encountered elder abuse in their work, 61.9 percent said yes, 29.6 percent said no, and 8.0 percent said they were uncertain. The percent of those who encountered elder abuse for each respondent group is shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS BY RESPONDENT GROUPS WHO ENCOUNTER ELDER ABUSE IN THEIR WORK

Respondent Group	Percent Who Encounter Abuse
Home Health Services	76
Legal Services: Justices of the Peace	33
Social Services: Hospital Social Workers	90
Health Care: Physicians	35
Health Care: Nurses	42
Law Enforcement: Sheriffs, Police Departments	48
Other	69

Not only is elder abuse occurring in all areas of Texas, but all types of elder abuse are occurring. Many elder abuse cases are in fact cases of multiple types of abuse. (Table 6.)

TABLE 6: PERCENTAGE OF TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE ENCOUNTERED

Type	Of Those Who Encountered Elder Abuse Percent Who Encountered Each Type
Physical Abuse	62
Exploitation	75
Verbal/Emotional Abuse	72
Active Neglect	50
Self-Neglect	82

Respondents were given the following definitions for type of abuse to guide them in identifying local conditions.

Physical Abuse--The elderly person has been hit, slapped, bruised, sexually molested, cut, burned, or physically restrained.

Exploitation-- The illegal or improper act of using resources of an elderly person for monetary or personal benefit.

Verbal/Emotional Abuse--The elderly person is insulted, treated as a child, frightened, humiliated, or threatened.

Active Neglect--The abuser withholds items necessary for daily living, such as food, medicine, money, or bathroom assistance.

Self-Neglect--The elderly person is alone, isolated, forgotten, and without financial and other resources.

The following are samples of the elder abuse incidents described by those who responded to the survey. Many of the people responding took the time to attach descriptions of the elder abuse which they encountered.

- "An elderly female, age 70, living with her son, was physically assaulted by him. The son was a drug user. He would beat her with her cane and take her money for drugs."
- "An elderly, bed-ridden woman living with her alcoholic son was very malnourished, dehydrated, and nonresponsive. It was apparent that the son was physically and sexually abusing her, as well as neglecting her health care needs."
- "A 66 year old patient was brought into an emergency room by her daughter. She was treated for multiple bruises, abrasions, and a black eye."

When the respondents were asked what the causative factors behind elder abuse were, 59 percent of those who encountered abuse in their work felt that long-term environmental conditions were the most frequent causative factor. (Table 7.)

TABLE 7

PERCENTAGE OF THOSE ENCOUNTERING ELDERLY ABUSE WHO IDENTIFIED* FACTOR MOST FREQUENT CAUSE OF ABUSE

Factor	Percent
Crisis in Environment--a sudden situation such as a son loses his job and, as a result, experiences stress, and his reaction is to abuse elderly parent.	11
Long-Term Environmental Conditions--such as crowded living quarters, extreme poverty, or marital conflict.	59
Alcohol/Drug Abuse by the Elderly Person	11
Alcohol/Drug Abuse by the Abuser	14
Probable Emotional Disorder of Abuser	16
Desire for Personal or Financial Gain	18

*Some respondents indicated two factors as the most frequent cause of elder abuse.

DISCUSSION*

Elder abuse is difficult to identify. Considering what we already know about the secrecy typically surrounding domestic violence to children and spouses, one can surmise that abuse of the elderly is not normally discussed. Therefore, we feel safe in assuming that this study speaks only of the tip of the iceberg--the 1/8 to 1/10 that is visible, and that there is serious under-reporting of elder abuse.

The probability of an individual reporting elder abuse is influenced by several factors. These include the level of one's general awareness of the existence of the problem and of specific signs of abuse, as well as the extent (in both frequency and duration) of contact with the elderly in the course of one's work. These factors differ among individuals and among professions. For example, we might anticipate that a social worker would be more likely to be aware of the social problem of elder abuse and its signs, as a result of exposure to it through daily work, professional literature, and contacts with colleagues, than a justice of the peace would be through similar channels in the legal profession. Thus, the social worker would be more likely to recognize and report cases of elder abuse, as was dramatically the case in this survey.

Also, the more time a person spends with an abused elder, the more likely he/she is to recognize and report the abuse. Professionals such as justices of the peace and physicians may see older persons for service infrequently and very often for only a short period of time. On the other hand, a person working for a service such as Meals on Wheels sees a client three times a week on a regular basis. This extended contact with the elderly person in his/her home greatly increases the worker's sensitivity to the situation, and thus the likelihood is enhanced that abuse of the elderly will be recognized and reported. These findings support the need to educate professionals in many fields as well as the public about elder abuse. Even so, it is worth noting that the 288 respondents who encountered elder abuse collectively recognized over two thousand cases.

All types of abuse were seen in substantial proportions. While self-neglect and exploitation were recognized most often, nearly two-third of the respondents had encountered cases of physical abuse, and almost three-fourths identified verbal or emotional abuse occurring to elderly persons. Active neglect, perhaps the most difficult to identify, was nonetheless seen by fifty percent of the respondents.

The many case examples that were given illustrate that all these types of abuse may occur to a serious, even life-threatening, degree. They also show that usually more than one type of abuse occurs in a given case, making the situation even more desperate for the elderly person. One respondent gave this example of exploitation combined with physical abuse: "One elderly person was beaten and sexually abused by a 42-year-old schizophrenic son until she signed over her life savings to him." Another respondent told of finding an 86-year-old woman who had been forcibly confined to bed by her 76-year-old husband for nine months. The woman was covered with bedsores and was semi-comatose when admitted to a hospital. The case overtly involved physical abuse and active neglect (failure to provide proper medical attention); we might speculate that is also involved emotional abuse and/or exploitation. It seems clear that most cases of elder abuse are complex and involve multiple types of abuse.

Caution must be taken that the frequency with which self-neglect was identified does not lead to minimization to the problem's overall seriousness or to an attitude of blaming the elderly person when self-neglect occurs. The high level of reporting of self-neglect needs to be viewed in light of the study's overwhelming indication that long term environmental conditions are the primary cause of elder abuse. Most often, these environmental conditions are ones over which the elderly person has little or no control due to lack of adequate resources such as income, housing or transportation. In such cases, self-neglect must be construed as involuntary, insofar as the elderly person perceives no other option. Also to be considered is the conjecture that, for those reporting elder abuse, self-neglect is the easiest or "most comfortable" form of abuse to report, since it avoids placing blame for the abuse on someone other than the victim.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this survey demonstrate that those with pre-selected clientele and those with consistent, regular contact with the elderly recognize more abuse than those in work not allowing extensive contact. In order to increase the latter's ability to recognize elder abuse, as well as over all elder abuse recognition and reporting, we have several recommendations.

We recommend a centralized, structured system for case finding and reporting of elder abuse be set up.

The nature of elder abuse requires that it be searched out and then reported, so that the problem as a whole can be studied further and individual cases remedied more readily. Because of the elderly person's isolation, this case-finding effort needs to be coupled with services which will help the elderly and his/her caretakers.

Education about the nature and causes of elder abuse is an imperative for both the general public and those professional workers caring for the elderly. The public needs to be made aware of the stress related to caring for an elderly person and of the services helpful in dealing with that stress. Those whose work brings them in contact with the elderly need to know what public as well as private services are available in the community, to be able to find the most adequate and responsible care for the abuse elder.

Another form of education would be intensive family counseling at the time that an aged parent moves into a child's home. Such counseling would emphasize the physical and psychological processes of aging and would include special instructions on care of a sick elderly person.

The effectiveness of any program dealing with abuse lies not only in its ability to alleviate conditions of the existing situation, but also in its ability to prevent the repetition of it.

ABUSE OF THE ELDERLY SURVEY

1. CHECK THE TYPE OF AGENCY OR ACTIVITY WITH WHICH YOU ARE INVOLVED:

_____ Home Health Services
_____ Legal Services
_____ Social Services
_____ Other (identify) _____
_____ Health Care: Physician
_____ Health Care: Nurse
_____ Law Enforcement

2. WHICH COUNTIES DO YOU SERVE? _____

3. IDENTIFY THE AREA IN WHICH YOU WORK:

_____ Urban
_____ Rural

Population:
_____ Less than 5,000
_____ 5,000 to 25,000
_____ 25,000 to 50,000
_____ 50,000 to 100,000
_____ 100,000 to 250,000
_____ Over 250,000

Note: The term "abuse" is used in this questionnaire to inlcude physical abuse, passive abuse (neglect), financial abuse (exploitation), and other forms of mistreatment of the elderly. "Elderly" is used to inlcude persons 65 years of age or older.

4. IN YOUR WORK, DO YOU ENCOUNTER CASES OF SUSPECTED OR ACTUAL ABUSE OF ELDERLY PERSONS?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain

Note: If your answer to the above question is "yes", please continue. If not, please return the questionnaire as is. Thank you.

5. INDICATE THE TYPES OF ABUSE WHICH YOU HAVE ENCOUNTERED: (check all that apply)

_____ a. PHYSICAL ABUSE - the elderly person has been hit, slapped, bruised, sexually molested, cut, burned, or physically restrained.

_____ b. EXPLOITATION - the illegal or improper act of using the resources of an elderly person for monetary or personal benefit.

_____ c. VERBAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE - the elderly person is insulted, treated as a child, frightened, humiliated, or threatened.

_____ d. ACTIVE NEGLECT - the abuser witholds items necessary for daily living, such as food, medicine, money or bathroom assistance.

_____ e. SELF-NEGLECT - the elderly person is alone, isolated, forgotten, and is without financial and other resources.

6. RANK THE TYPES OF ABUSE ENCOUNTERED MOST FREQUENTLY. ("1" is the type encountered most frequently; "5" is the type encountered least frequently.)

_____ PHYSICAL ABUSE
_____ EXPLOITATION
_____ VERBAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE
_____ ACTIVE NEGLECT
_____ SELF-NEGLECT

7. INSOFAR AS YOU ARE AWARE OF THE CAUSATIVE FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE CASES OF ABUSE KNOWN TO YOU, RANK THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES WHICH APPLY. ("1" is the factor most frequently encountered; "6" is the factor least frequently encountered.)

_____ CRISIS IN THE ENVIRONMENT - a sudden situation such as a son loses his job, and, as a result, experiences stress, and his reaction is to abuse his elderly parent.

_____ LONG-TERM ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS - such as crowded living quarters, extreme poverty, or marital conflict.

_____ ALCOHOL/DRUG ABUSE BY THE ELDERLY PERSON

_____ ALCOHOL/DRUG ABUSE BY THE ABUSER

_____ PROBABLE EMOTIONAL DISORDER OF THE ABUSER

_____ DESIRE FOR PERSONAL OR FINANCIAL GAIN

8. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SERVICES HAVE YOU PROVIDED TO ELDERLY VICTIMS OF ABUSE? FOR WHICH SERVICES HAVE YOU MADE REFERRALS? WHICH SERVICES HAVE BEEN NEEDED, BUT WERE NOT AVAILABLE?

Check where appropriate:

SERVICES	PROVIDED	REFERRED	NEEDED/NOT AVAILABLE
a. Social Casework			
b. Emergency Shelter (temporary)			
c. Housing (long-term)			
d. Legal			
e. Emergency Medical			
f. Long-Term Health Care			
g. Personal or Household Care			
h. Financial Assistance			
i. Counseling (psychological)			
j. Hospitalization (psychiatric)			

9. IN THE COURSE OF A YEAR, APPROXIMATELY HOW MANY CASES OF ABUSE OF THE ELDERLY DO YOU ENCOUNTER?

☐ 0-4 ☐ 5-10 ☐ More than 10

10. IF TIME PERMITS, WOULD YOU DESCRIBE IN DETAIL A SITUATION OF ABUSE, NEGLECT OR EXPLOITATION OF AN ELDERLY PERSON WITH WHICH YOU ARE FAMILIAR? Use another sheet, please.

Thank you. Please return SURVEY by SEPTEMBER 1, 1982.

GRAY PANTHERS of AUSTIN
7710 West Rim Drive
Austin, Texas 78731

_____ I would like a summary of the results of this survey. Mail to: _____

_____